



Callie Gale Heilmann, Co-Director  
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**Testimony IN SUPPORT of**  
**H.B. 5004 - AN ACT IMPLEMENTING EARLY VOTING**  
**Raised S.B. 1057 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE AND EARLY VOTING**  
**Raised S.B. 1064 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY VOTING**  
**S.J. 29 - RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING**  
**H.J. 1 - RESOLUTION APPROVING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING**  
**Raised H.B. 6693 - AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING - if AMENDED with the following additions**

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Good morning Co-Chairs Senator Flexer and Rep. Blumenthal, Ranking members Senator Sampson and Rep. Mastrofrancesco and esteemed members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I am the Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now Votes. We organize the Unrig Bridgeport Coalition, which includes our important grassroots partners - Bridgeport Strong, Greater Bridgeport NAACP, Greater Bridgeport ED Gomes Black Democratic Club, Make the Road CT, PT Partners, CT Citizen Action Group, SEIU 1199, and more.

My colleague Gemeem Davis submitted testimony in support of early voting. On behalf of our coalition, I am testifying today **in support of the bills related to no-excuse absentee voting, SJ 29, HJ 1, and HB 6693, with some small amendments.**

We worked on the ground during our 2021 municipal elections, knocking on doors to get out the vote. We know firsthand how important the expansion to absentee voting was in 2020 and 2021 for Bridgeport residents who were overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, in the 2020 presidential election - in part due expanded access to the ballot but mainly because all voters received AB applications in the mail - Bridgeport had the highest voter turnout of any large municipality in the state

We absolutely do not already have no-excuse absentee voting. The restrictions are real and continue to have real world impacts. The closed nature of Connecticut elections - and the

burdens placed on voters to exercise our right to vote - means that local elections in our state can be manipulated when political actors are highly motivated.

What we have in Bridgeport are political operatives paid by partisan actors and campaigns that manipulate some of our most vulnerable voters - our elderly, disabled, low-income, and monolingual Spanish speakers. The current absentee ballot process makes it easy to abuse the system, and to abuse voters.

When we helped voters sue city officials and the Ganim campaign after Bridgeport's 2019 mayoral primary, evidence proved that political operatives in Bridgeport are paid to solely distribute AB applications - which is against state law; that they lie to voters about the laws governing who is qualified to use an AB - against state law; that they forged voters signatures and applications - against state law; that they took voters ballots from them - against state law.

[State Superior Court Judge Stevens, in his ruling on this case, noted that it was the first of its kind in the state, and indicated that Connecticut's laws on absentee ballots were being exploited and therefore required close attention of the General Assembly.](#) In particular, Judge Stevens called for the following reforms:

- early voting;
- prohibitions against party workers circulating absentee ballots;
- and an end to the strict requirements on the use of absentee ballots

You all are working on two out of the three! In order to create an inclusive, multiracial democracy in this state, we need real, structural change. No one should come between a voter and their access to the ballot. What **we** need is to be freed from this abusive system. For the voters of Bridgeport, that structural change will come when you all write the laws governing no-excuse absentee voting and **fully restricting paid party workers** from inserting themselves between voters and their access to the ballot. The end goal of this legislature should be to expand no-excuse access permanently to mail-in voting. Every voter in Connecticut should be enfranchised at the same exact time by receiving a ballot in the mail - and then be free to choose whether they'd like to vote by mail, vote early, or vote on Election Day.

Finally, on HB 6693, we support the bill but oppose the provision that makes AB applications subject to FOIA. While we know that making applications subject to public records request might curb some of the manipulation we have described, it is unnecessary to put into law since we believe that we should move our state towards full enfranchisement of absentee voting. I know you all believe strongly in democracy, voting rights, and fair elections. It's time to strengthen our democracy by protecting and expanding voting rights.

Thank you,

Callie Gale Heilmann